

War on Innocents

Like so many others who woke up safe and sound on the morning of September 11, 2001, the staff of *Public Perspective* had other plans. The cover story for our upcoming issue was to be public opinion on energy policy. Articles were already written, and data pages were being researched and laid out. We were also preparing a special feature article by Stanley B. Greenberg and Robert O. Boorstin on a groundbreaking survey of people living in war-torn countries, conducted in 1999 by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

And then the clock struck 8:45, and the world changed. The magazine had to change, too. Suddenly, questions of energy policy were at the front of nobody's mind, and, indeed, much of the data we had assembled on the subject had already been rendered irrelevant by the horrendous events in New York City, Washington DC, and the sky over rural Pennsylvania. At the same time, the question of what happens to ordinary people in wartime had abruptly taken on a terrible immediacy.

Energy problems are still important and will continue to be for a long time, so those stories are still here, along with an abbreviated treatment of the data and some of our regular features. On the cover, however, is now the most tragic image we have ever published. And in "War on Innocents," the section to follow, we have done our best to show, from the public's point of view, what it means to the people when violence is visited upon nations. "People on War," the Greenberg and Boorstin article, leads off. Robert Blendon and John Benson look to past conflicts for insight on what

pollsters will need to focus on as the present one continues to unfold.

And then there's the data essay. "First Shock" presents a synopsis of some of the tentative glimpses public opinion polling took into the minds of Americans in the days immediately following the terrorist attacks. With the exception of President Bush's job approval rating for September 21-22, all of the data come from surveys conducted within the one awful week beginning with September 11.

It is important that we take great care in interpreting these data. They were gathered at a time when dispassionate thinking was impossible for most people, respondents and pollsters alike. Many are from one-day polls, which we usually avoid using in *Public Perspective* because of their greater margins of error and potentially skewed sampling frames.

These data yield no view of carefully considered opinion on the part of Americans; they represent nothing more nor less than the reaction of a public, in shock, to one of the worst tragedies ever to take place on United States soil. They paint an extraordinary picture.

War on innocents, war on innocence—the double meaning is deliberate. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, American life—and opinion—will surely not be the same. And, whether the changes are for better or for worse, polling will be there to document them. So will *Public Perspective*.

—Lisa Ferraro Parmelee, Editor

